

Matter of Fact

No Barry, No LBJ

By Joseph Alsop

STUDIES BY the White House political experts have alerted the President to expect a substantial loss of Democratic congressional seats in the election next November.

The reason for this pessimistic forecast has nothing whatever to do with war, inflation or any of the other factors the wiseacres mutter about. Losses are thought to be inevitable, mainly because the name of Lyndon Johnson will not head the Democratic ticket and, maybe even more important, the name of Barry Goldwater will not head the Republican ticket.

The plain truth is that the mathematics of this year's election are highly unfavorable to the President's Party. In 1964, to begin with, 45 Democrats took over formerly Republican seats in the House of Representatives.

Every one of these new members who rode into office on the Johnson landslide must of course be regarded as marginal, however hard he has cultivated his grass roots in the interval. Per contra, all the Republican members of the House who survived the Johnson landslide must be regarded as hardy perennials. If they were able to win despite Goldwater, they certainly ought to win again.

THUS THE AREA of Democratic vulnerability is large; whereas the Republicans appear to be close to invulnerable. No consolation for the Democrats is to be found, either, in the special situations in the key states where they made gains last time.

The least depressing, on the whole, is New York, where no less than seven House seats were picked up in 1964. As of this moment, Gov. Nelson Rockefeller appears to be in deep political trouble; the forecasters as-



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sert that the Governor may be really badly beaten, if the Democratic nominee is the present President of the New York City Borough Council, Frank O'Connor.

But Rockefeller is always capable of surprising recoveries, and, in any case, no Democrat is likely to win the governorship by more

than a third of Mr. Johnson's New York margin of 2.5 million votes. Thus conditions for New York's seven new Democratic House members are still bound to be less favorable this year, although perhaps not catastrophically less favorable.

In several of the other big states where House gains were made, however, the adjective catastrophic comes close to being justified. President Johnson took Michigan by 1.6 million votes and the Democrats gained five seats. One seat was gained in Illinois, where the Johnson majority was 1.9 million.

PENNSYLVANIA went for Mr. Johnson by a majority of nearly 1.4 million and two House seats were gained. The President's New Jersey lead was above 900,000, and four House seats were gained. The Ohio gain in House seats was also four, and here the Johnson majority was over a million.

The contrast is dire indeed, if you peer into the

future to guess the probable outcome of this year's election in the above-listed states. In Michigan, the star turn will be to Gov. George Romney, who is expected to win re-election in a walk. In Ohio, another well-entrenched Republican governor, James Rhodes, should also have a big majority.

In Pennsylvania, the odds-on favorite to succeed Gov. William Scranton is Scranton's protege, Lieut. Gov. Raymond Shafer. In New Jersey, Republican Sen. Clifford Case should win with ease. Even in Illinois, where the big contest will be between Sen. Paul Douglas and the progressive Republican, Charles Percy, the race can easily be close enough to endanger any sitting Democratic Congressman who needed the President's help last time.

IN THE LESSER states there are one or two bright spots like Iowa, which seems to be on the way to becoming a Democratic stronghold under Gov. Harold Hughes. But there are danger areas, too, like Washington. As for California, the rule may hold once more that Gov. Pat Brown never wins except on Election Day. But marginal Democratic Congressmen are most unlikely to benefit from a state-wide party margin that will hardly resemble President Johnson's California majority of 1.9 million.

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Altogether, it will be something of a miracle if the Democratic loss in the House falls very far below the 50 seats the Republicans are now claiming. For it must also be remembered that the Republicans may again pick up a few more seats in the South, improving on their Southern gains in 1964.

Everyone will then say to the President: "I told you so," whether they have advocated scuttle and run in Vietnam, or H-bombs on Hanoi, or lower taxes or higher taxes. But the real reasons will in fact be the markedly different circumstances of this year's election, and the sad plight of the Democratic Party in a good many states. Only the latter point should worry President Johnson.